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Student Researchers Anticipate Upcoming NASA Balloon Launch

Elementary through high school student researchers from across the United States are scheduled to launch their experiments on a high-altitude NASA scientific balloon from Fort Sumner, N.M., no earlier than May 1, 2004.

Students from 20 schools and one Girl Scout troop will measure different types of radiation, atmospheric pressure, static electricity and temperature during the flight and their effects on test articles such as various materials and microscopic organisms. One experiment will take digital images during the flight.

The experiments were selected as part of a new program sponsored by the NASA Education Flight Projects Office that is designed to give future engineers and scientists the opportunity to design, build, and fly experiments on NASA flight vehicles.

The experiment components are in brick size plastic containers aboard two larger containers about the size of large briefcases. This will be the first flight of the student experiment carriers aboard a NASA scientific balloon.

NASA will retrieve the carriers within hours of the completion of the flight and student investigators from 14 states will receive their experiments within two to three weeks to begin data analysis.

Scientists use data collected during balloon flights to help answer important questions about the formation of the universe, the Earth's atmosphere, the Sun-Earth connection, and the space environment.

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While the basics of ballooning have not changed, balloon capabilities have increased and their dependability has improved greatly. The primary mission for this balloon flight is to test a new heavy-lift balloon design that can carry approximately 8,000 pounds to an altitude as high as 119,000 feet above the Earth for approximately six to eight hours; current balloon systems lift up to 6,000 pounds.

When launched, the balloon will be taller than the 555-foot Washington Monument. When it reaches float altitude near the edge of space, the helium-filled balloon will be wider than the length of a football field.

For information about the student experiment balloon carrier project and how to participate, visit

http://www.wff.nasa.gov/semb/

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